

STOP ISRAEL

THE ASSAULT ON LEBANON IS AN ASSAULT ON PEACE

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BRITAIN'S SHAMEFUL ROLE

The G8 statement named Hamas and Hezbollah as 'extremist elements' who initiated the crisis, and who (with 'those that support them') were trying to 'plunge the Middle East into chaos and provoke a wider conflict'. Israel, on the other hand, was merely asked to 'be mindful' and to 'exercise utmost restraint'. The Arab groups were to cease their military actions 'immediately'. No such urgency was required of Israel. <tinyurl.com/s6nqz

'The US **and Britain** insisted.. at the G8 summit in St Petersburg that criticism of Israel be removed from a joint communique.' (*Guardian*, 18 July, pp. 1-2) 'The Bush administration, **backed by Britain**, has blocked efforts for an immediate halt to the fighting initiated at the UN security council, the G8 summit in St Petersburg and the European foreign minister's meeting in Brussels.' (*Guardian*, 19 July, p. 1) '[C]riticism of Israel in an original draft [of the EU statement] was diluted after pressure from **Britain** and Germany, Israel's closest EU allies.' (*Guardian*, 18 July, p. 1)

BLAIR'S SHAMEFUL ROLE

Tony Blair said 'an immediate ceasefire by Israel' was not possible until 'the underlying reasons why this violence has broken out' had been addressed—the 'extremists' who 'believe in fundamentalist states and are at war not against Israel's actions, but against its existence'. <tinyurl.com/p4ob5>

Conservative MP Sir Peter Tapsell once again gave the appropriate rejoinder, asking whether Mr Blair had attempted to explain to President Bush 'that one of the root causes of the spread of chaos in the middle east has been the failure, over 40 years, of successive American Administrations to persuade Israel to **accept United Nations resolution 242**, which requires it to **return to its legal frontiers of 1967**? That failure has caused an inevitable degree of bitterness, which has led to the creation and sustaining of various guerrilla militias which are now increasingly regarded as part of an Islamic jihad.' (Hansard, 18 July <tinyurl.com/oexwv>)

'Campaigners have demanded that Britain impose a **ban on arms sales to Israel** after figures showed that the Government licensed **£23m worth of weaponry** to be shipped to the country in the past year... Equipment included components for naval guns, military helicopters, submarines and electronic equipment.' (*Independent*, 15 July, p. 22)

We are witnessing Israeli state terrorism. We are complicit in it.

250 LEBANESE DEAD, \$2 BILLION-WORTH OF DAMAGE

After seven days of Israeli bombardment, the Lebanese Government estimates the damage to civilian infrastructure at \$2bn worth of 'roads, bridges, telecommunications, electricity, ports, airports and even private sector facilities, including a milk factory and food warehouses'. At least 250 Lebanese have been killed, and over 50,000 people have fled from the heavily Shia-populated south of the country. (*Financial Times*, 19 July, p. 8)

Israeli forces attacked two Lebanese army bases, killing 11 soldiers, 'marking another widening of targets'. Jihad Azour, the Lebanese finance minister, told the *FT*: 'the destruction is not targeting one group and it's not only making Hizbollah pay. It's making all of Lebanese society suffer.'

He went on to say that, 'based on the pattern of attacks, Israel was slicing the country in different parts and isolating in particular the south and the eastern Baalbeck region, a Hizbollah stronghold, in addition to a complete blockade of the country by sea, air and land.' Mr Azour said the Lebanese Government 'was struggling to organise food deliveries and services to these regions'. (*Financial Times*, 19 July, p. 8)

The *Guardian* reported that 230 Lebanese civilians and 65 Lebanese soldiers had died so far; and 13 Israeli civilians and 12 Israeli soldiers. In total: 295 Lebanese deaths and 25 Israeli deaths. (19 July, p. 4)

GAZA CONTINUES TO SUFFER

106 Palestinians have died in Israel's Gaza offensive since 28 June, and 300 have been injured, according to Jomaa al-Saqaa of al-Shifa hospital. 'An Israeli airstrike destroyed Gaza's main power plant, leaving 1.4 million people dependent on Israel for electricity. The supply is erratic and residents are left to guess whether they will have power from one day to the next.' ('As the world looks elsewhere, death toll rises in Gaza', *Times*, 19 July, p. 8)

CHILDREN! CHILDREN!

'Whatever the Israelis' intended target, the bomb fell on a small water canal next to the Qasmia refugee camp [near Tyre, in southern Lebanon], home to about 500 Palestinians. Its victims were 11 children taking an afternoon swim in the canal. The first blast left a crater nearly four metres deep, burying many of the swimmers deep under the orange earth. Seven of the children were injured, three critically. Three others have not been found.

'The scene was littered with small plastic sandals, several caked in blood. Ismael, the father of one of the children, sat on the edge of the crater, his head in his hands weeping. **"Children! Children!" he roared through his tears, "Children here! My son here."** He stood and looked down into the crater: **"Is Hizbullah here? Only children here,"** he said.'

'Another man staggered around behind Ismael, also unable to control his grief. The children were taken to the intensive care unit, many caked in earth, having been buried deep in the ground.'

'Asked how it compared to 1996, when Israel launched an attack on the south, killing scores of civilians, Dr Mrouwe [head of the Jabal Amal hospital in Tyre] said: "It's incomparable, incomparable. In 1996, the majority [of casualties] were fighters. This time we have yet to receive any fighters.'" (*Guardian*, 18 July, p. 4 <tinyurl.com/h6jn4>)

HOW LONG WILL THIS GO ON?

Two headlines: 'Battle will go on for weeks, say Israelis'. (*Telegraph*, 19 July, p. 12) On the other hand, 'United States to Israel: you have one more week to blast Hizbullah'. (*Guardian*, 19 July, p. 1)

'Amir Peretz, the Israeli Defence Minister, said that his country was determined to create a buffer zone in southern Lebanon. "We intend to complete this operation. We have no intention of allowing anyone to stop us." ' (*Times*, 18 July, p. 7) In reality, Israel and the US are not omnipotent.

'Israel always fights its wars against the clock, rushing to achieve its objectives before pressure for a ceasefire becomes irresistible. Israeli military officials suggested yesterday they needed 72 hours more fighting.' (*Guardian*, 18 July, p. 30) 'An Israeli security source said [on 17 July] that Israel believed that it had a week to inflict as much damage as it could on Hezbollah [actually, the Lebanese people] before the US, Israel's strongest supporter, became unable to resist international pressure for a ceasefire.' (*Times*, 18 July, p. 1) This will go on as long as the US can resist the world.

ISRAEL'S GOALS

The current onslaught is **not** to recover the two abducted Israeli soldiers. 'Avi Dichter, the [Israeli] public security minister, said Israel would eventually have to contemplate a prisoner exchange.' (*Telegraph*, 19 July, p. 12) In 2004, Hezbollah traded one Israeli colonel (captured in 2001) for '30 Lebanese and 420 Palestinian prisoners'. (*Sunday Times*, 16 July, p. 2)

The Israeli Government says it has a larger goal: the disarmament of Hezbollah. Realists such as Shlomo Brom, former strategy chief for the Israeli army, are less ambitious: 'What is feasible is a buffer zone in southern Lebanon where the only presence allowed is the Lebanese army and an effective international force, like the NATO force in the Balkans.' Hezbollah largely neutralized as a defence force/political party, in other words.

Another Israeli goal is 'the assassination of Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah, the Hizbollah leader, who the Israeli military recognizes as a charismatic and intelligent foe.' '[P]lanners admit that there is a limited amount Israel can do to put Hizbollah permanently out of action... an air campaign cannot hope to destroy the [weapons] supply lines nor all of Hizbollah's well hidden, well distributed weapons stockpiles'. (*Telegraph*, 19 July, p. 12)

AGAINST PEACE

More fundamentally, just as with Hamas (see *Briefing 90: The Gaza Siege*), Israel is frightened by the growing moderation of Hezbollah, and its highly successful turn from violence to politics: 'Hezbollah has become the biggest of Lebanon's many political factions, commanding the largest single bloc in parliament.' (*Sunday Times*, 16 July, p. 2)

The pounding of Lebanon will strengthen the militarists within Hezbollah, and harden its support base—while alienating non-Shias and destabilizing Lebanon's fragile political settlement. These are clearly foreseeable consequences. Logically, they are therefore **desired** outcomes.

David Clark, former Labour special adviser at the Foreign Office, notes that Western politicians assume that 'when Israeli ministers complain of having no "partner for peace", they actually want one. A much more sensible approach would be to credit them with having the intelligence to know exactly what they are doing and to work backwards from there. If so, it might become become apparent that far from wanting a partner with which to negotiate, the Israeli government is acting with the specific intention of forestalling that possibility.' (*Guardian*, 17 July, p. 25)